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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: MIDEAST CRISIS: PORTUGAL CONCERNED BUT NEUTRAL

¶1. (U) Summary: Since July 14, Portuguese government officials have made public comments lamenting the crisis in the Middle East and reassuring the Portuguese public that the violence will not affect Portugal, but has scrupulously avoided taking sides. Leftist Portuguese political leaders, however, criticized both the GOP and Europe in general for "following the U.S. lead" and "not doing enough." Portugal will likely continue to follow the EU's strategy and focus on ensuring safe evacuation for its citizens. End summary.

Concern over Instability

¶2. (U) Both Portuguese President Cavaco Silva and Foreign Minister Amado have expressed concern about the violence and called for an international resolution to the crisis. (All quotes below are informal translations.)

-- "It is very dangerous for the world. The level of conflict that has been reached in the Middle East is truly worrying and I hope the international community quickly exerts the necessary pressure upon all parties involved to make them resume negotiations." - President Anibal Cavaco Silva, July 15

-- "We have been following with great concern the situation in the Middle East resulting from the conflict between the State of Israel and the Hezbollah movement and we repudiate the escalation of violence because it endangers innocent civilian lives." - Foreign Minister Luis Amado, July 16

-- "Naturally we support the diplomatic efforts being developed by several sectors of the international community with a view to re-establishing dialogue and an agreement to put an end to this escalation. We have been following the efforts of the Finnish EU Presidency and we identify with the EU's diplomatic solution to this conflict. We are also concerned - and the Secretary of State for the (Portuguese) communities has been following throughout the day - with the situation of the Portuguese caught in the middle of this conflict, be they tourists or emigrants." -FM Luis Amado, July 17

Impact on Portugal

¶3. (U) Prime Minister Socrates and Finance Minister Teixeira's have focused on how events could affect Portugal's economy and citizens:

-- "Portuguese citizens currently in Lebanon are well aware of the situation. The contingency plans and conditions to have (Portuguese citizens) return to Portugal have been

created." - PM Jose Socrates, July 15

-- "We regard the latest events and the consequent increase in fuel prices with concern, but we have no reason to fear that this could undermine the growth of the Portuguese economy." - Finance Minister Fernando Teixeira dos Santos, July 15

Leftist Politicians Criticize

14. (U) While the GOP has refrained from passing judgment on either the Hezbollah or Israel, leftist political parties have strongly condemned Israel's actions and the GOP's lack of censure.

-- "The PCP (Portuguese Communist Party) condemns the Zionist Government of Israel and demands the end of the criminal escalation of violence that is causing numerous victims (()) and dragging all the Middle East into a conflict of even more vast and dangerous proportions."

- Official PCP communique, July 14

-- "I am sure we will not hear this Foreign Minister say anything because he will comply with whatever the U.S. has to say." - PCP Leader Jeronimo de Sousa, July 16

-- "The situation in Israel is crossed by rivers of Palestinian blood and for one single reason which is the richness of oil. That is why the U.S. wanted to occupy Iraq, and that is why it now threatens Iran.

"The savagery that is now taking place in the frontiers of Israel with Palestine and Lebanon is authorized, promoted,

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and encouraged by the U.S. President George W. Bush.

"Europe, who has remained silent, should play a role to defend those countries and to prevent war." - Left Bloc Leader Francisco Louca, July 15.

Comment

15. (SBU) We suspect that GOP leaders will continue to walk a fine line on this issue, appealing for a negotiated solution to the crisis in the Middle East and avoiding blaming either side for the current violence, while continuing to profess solidarity with the EU position. Criticism of Israel and the U.S. by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Left Bloc will continue, but will have little effect on GOP policy, as those parties represent such a small percentage of Portugal's population (the PCP holds 12 of Parliament's 230 seats, and the Left Bloc holds eight.) By contrast, Portugal's two main political parties -- the left-of-center PS and the right of center PSD (who together control 196 Parliamentary seats) -- have said nothing about the crisis; their websites convey positions on a range of current events but do not mention the fighting in Israel and Lebanon.
O'Neal